

Mary: A Faithful Song

December 10, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Luke 1:26-56

Session Outline

1. A Surprising Encounter (Luke 1:26-33)
2. A Godly Response (Luke 1:34-38)
3. A Faithful Song (Luke 1:39-56)

Theological Theme

God wants to use His people to do great things. Even in extremely difficult or life changing moments, we can trust in the Lord. Mary expressed her faith in worship following a very unexpected announcement from the angel Gabriel.

Call to Action

What does God want to do through you that will require your trust?



Leader Guide

Mary: A Faithful Song

Introduction

Have you ever discounted a person's possible influence or effectiveness because of their age? People often think that only those of a certain age can be counted on to lead in different areas. The gaps between generations can seem wide, but in the economy of the Lord, age is a non-factor. Think about how God has chosen to use the elderly, those in the prime of life, and the very young to be part of miraculous things throughout history. God has always been more concerned about a person's heart and attitude than how old he or she is.

Anne Frank wrote her diary through years of hiding from the Nazis, and it became a widely published and acclaimed book. Easton La Chappelle developed his first robotic hand using Lego and fishing wire, then joined the robotics team at NASA. Louis Braille created the Braille system for the blind or visually impaired to read and write. Mary was the mother of Jesus. These and many others are teenagers who changed the world. They did not let their age keep them from making a difference and setting an example to the rest of the world.

- ❓ Who is a teenager you know about who has made a difference in some way? Why do you think some people are surprised to see teens doing big things?
- ❓ When have you been encouraged to see young people involved in great works of God?

Session Summary

Scripture is full of ordinary people that God used in extraordinary ways as part of His great plan. One such person who demonstrated extreme faith and trust in the Lord was the mother of Jesus. Mary is not quoted extensively in the Bible but when she is, her words display the kind of faith we should all strive to emulate. When faced with an impossible situation and even personal risk, she chose to believe God and responded with praise and worship.

1. A Surprising Encounter (Luke 1:26-33)

Last week, we read of the angel Gabriel announcing the coming birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah. In today's text, Gabriel showed up again a few months later with an even more miraculous announcement. God sent him to a relatively unknown town and an unsuspecting betrothed young woman named Mary. Betrothal was the second stage of the marriage process and was a more binding agreement than our idea of engagement. Although a betrothed couple was bound together with promises and commitment, they were not intimate with one another until after the marriage ceremony. The betrothed woman would also still reside with her family until the bridegroom came to get her and the official marriage took place.

Mary was a young woman that scholars place somewhere in her teen years. Scripture tells us that she was a virgin. This is an important detail because it is tied to the miraculous nature of what God would do through Mary.

- ❓ The news the angel brought was amazing. But it also could bring Mary fear. What could be fearful about this announcement?

Imagine as a teenager that you suddenly were confronted by an angel. When Gabriel addressed Mary, he spoke in glowing and favorable terms. Mary's response to the angel showed her character and her humility.

- ❓ Mary found favor with God. How have all who have trusted in Jesus also found favor with God? Do you typically view yourself as favored by God? Why or why not?

Gabriel encouraged Mary not to be afraid as he announced why he appeared that day. It was all about Jesus, a son. The Messiah was coming to earth and Mary was chosen to be His mother. She would be used as a vessel to bring about the long-awaited promises about the Messiah. This was a life changing encounter for this young unwed, teenage girl.

Gabriel made it clear that the Son she would carry was to be named Jesus and He would be great. No one in history has had as much impact on the world as Jesus Christ. Jesus would be Mary's son, but He was also the Son of God or the Son of the Most High. The angel connected Jesus to the throne of David, as the rightful heir to rule, and His Kingdom would last forever.

- ❓ Application: When was a time you heard from the Lord unexpectedly? How did you respond?

2. A Godly Response (Luke 1:34-38)

Many reactions would have been understandable for Mary in this moment. Mary didn't panic. She didn't bombard the angel for more details. Mary asked one logical question: How can it be since I am a virgin? Mary's question didn't show a lack of trust but awe-filled wonder. When God works around us and uses us for His purposes, one right response is wonder.



What questions would you have been tempted to ask in that moment if you were Mary?

The word overshadow that the angel used in verse 35 to describe how the conception would happen means “to cover with a cloud.” We can think of this similarly to the shekinah glory of God that appeared as a cloud in the Old Testament (Exodus 13:21-22). The cloud was a visible manifestation of the glory and presence of God. God's same power that worked in the lives of people like Moses would be at work in Mary's life too.

Gabriel also informed Mary of Elizabeth's pregnancy. This would have served as further evidence that what Gabriel proclaimed was true. Since they were relatives, Mary would have been aware that Elizabeth and Zechariah were childless. This happy news from the angel of the Lord was confirmation that if God could do something like that then he could also do what the angel announced to Mary. This claim would be verified when Mary visited with Elizabeth as well.



When was God's work in your life affirmed by others who also experienced God working in them?

Mary responded faithfully that she was a servant of the Lord. With humility she acknowledged her favorable position in the Lord's eyes. She said, “May it happen to me as you have said” (v. 38). Mary's simple yet powerful response gives us an example to follow. We will all face times when we realize God is working among us. Will we respond in faith or skepticism?

Although she would face challenges as an unwed pregnant woman in a small town, Mary trusted that if God wanted to bring about this miracle, He would take care of the details, and she could trust and obey Him. Gabriel's declaration that nothing is impossible with God was reassurance that she could believe in and count on the Lord every step of the way.



Application: Where do you need to be reminded that nothing is impossible with God?

3. A Faithful Song (Luke 1:39-56)

Following the visit from Gabriel, Mary went to visit Elizabeth to confirm the report about her being with child. Mary found Elizabeth just as Gabriel had said, and the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. This was further confirmation of the news Gabriel had brought to Mary.

Elizabeth named Mary as the most blessed of women. God chose Mary above any other woman for a high purpose. Additionally, Elizabeth acknowledged the unique nature of the Child Mary would bear. Elizabeth expressed her sense of unworthiness to receive Mary as a guest. Although God worked in a miraculous way to provide a son for Elizabeth, she proclaimed the superiority of the One Mary carried. In response Mary burst out in a song of praise (1:46-55).

The joy Mary knew at that moment came through her realization that God was her Savior. Mary rejoiced that God came near to her and rescued her from her lowly state. He bestowed on her a unique privilege. She experienced the freedom to serve the One who showered His grace on her. Later, she would realize that God's salvation in the Child she was carrying went far beyond earthly status and human privilege.

Mary glorified God for three specific attributes—His power, holiness, and mercy. She also reflected on the “great things” God had done for her (v. 49). As affirmed in Deuteronomy 10:21, God does “great things.” Whereas in Deuteronomy this refers to God's having worked his wonders for Israel in leading them out of Egypt, here the “great things” refers to the virginal conception of Jesus, who in His ministry would bring about the events described in the second half of Mary's song (vv. 51-55).

-  How does reflecting on God's attributes affect the way you worship?
-  What contrasts or role reversals did Mary make in this passage? What does this indicate about the kingdom of God and Jesus's purpose in coming to earth?

In her song, Mary moved from praising God for who He is and His blessing to describing the significance of His redemptive act for believing Israel. Following the prophets' manner of speaking and writing, she sang of future events with certainty as though they already had occurred. Mary described God's remarkable activity in bringing the Messiah to fulfill God's kingdom.

Mary's Hymn

Mary's hymn praises the faithfulness of God to His promise and His blessing of those who are humble before Him, setting up a major Lukan theme. Her praise is personal in tone.

Mary emphasized the great reversals that would occur because of God's gift of the Messiah. Through His Messiah, God would bring down the powerful and exalt the dispossessed. Mary was a prime example of God's lifting up a person of humble circumstances and was symbolic of what God would do for all people who would respond positively to His gift of grace.

In the final statements of Mary's song of praise, she recalled God's mercy to Israel and to her. God helped His servant Israel, but not only in the past. Mary's words applied to God's creative act in causing her to conceive and to bear the Messiah. In sending Jesus to be born to Mary, God showed His mercy and love to His children, in keeping with promises He had made centuries earlier to Abraham and his descendants.



Application: How has God caused you to wait on Him? What lessons have you learned in God's "waiting room"?

Conclusion

Zechariah's response to an unusual announcement from an angel resulted in him being mute for the length of his wife's pregnancy. Mary, the virgin teenager, was told even more impossible news, yet she responded with faith and trust. Her soul cried out with praise, and she rejoiced in the Lord. Her response was a beautiful song filled with Scripture and praise for the honor of being used by God to carry out His plans.

God still desires to use His children to do His work today. We each have opportunity to respond like Mary when we face challenging situations that the Lord wants to use for His glory. Each person must make this choice. Will you choose to trust our all-powerful, merciful, compassionate, and loving God, or will you place your trust in yourself and things of the world that will never satisfy? Mary was an ordinary teenager, but God used her to bring about the most important event in the history of the world.

- ❓ How is God calling you to respond to Him in faith and obedience as Mary did?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage this type of response in one another?
- ❓ How will living this way give us opportunities for gospel conversations with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for being the God of the impossible who invites you into His work. Offer yourself as His servant and commit to trusting what He calls you to do.

Memory Verse

"See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. - Luke 1:38

Additional Resources

- *Luke* by R. Kent Hughes
- *Luke* by R.C. Sproul
- *Luke 1-12 for You* by Mike McKinley

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Luke

Purpose

The Gospel of Luke is a carefully researched (1:3), selective presentation of the person and life of Jesus Christ, designed to strengthen the faith of believers (1:3–4) and to challenge the misconceptions of unbelievers, especially those from a Greek background. Its portrait of Jesus is well balanced, skillfully emphasizing his divinity and perfect humanity.

Author

The author of the Third Gospel is not named. Considerable evidence points to Luke as its author. Much of that proof is found in the book of Acts, which identifies itself as a sequel to Luke (Ac 1:1–3). A major line of evidence has to do with the so-called “we” sections of the book (Ac 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1–16). Most of Acts is narrated in third-person plural (“they,” “them”), but some later sections having to do with the ministry of the apostle Paul unexpectedly shift to first-person plural (“we,” “us”). This indicates that the author had joined the apostle Paul for the events recorded in those passages. Since there are no “we” passages in the Gospel of Luke, that fits with the author stating that he used eyewitness testimony to the life of Jesus (1:2), indicating he was not such an eyewitness himself.

Setting

Since Luke wrote both the Third Gospel and the book of Acts (Ac 1:1–3), it is relevant to consider the dating of both books together. The events at the end of Acts occurred around AD 62–63. That is the earliest point at which Acts could have been written. If Acts was written in the early AD 60s from Rome, where Paul was imprisoned for two years (Ac 28:30), the Third Gospel could date from an earlier stage of that period of imprisonment. The other reasonable possibility is during Paul’s earlier two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (Ac 24:27). From that location, Luke would have been able to travel and interview the eyewitnesses to Jesus’s life and ministry who were still alive.

Special Features

The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. Focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, this Gospel is part one of a two-part history, the book of Acts being part two. Both were dedicated to “most honorable Theophilus” (Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1).

Extended Commentary

Luke 1:26-56

1:26–38 Here the announcement of Jesus’s coming birth is told from Mary’s perspective. Matthew gives it from Joseph’s vantage point (Mt 1:18–23).

1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel, the same angel who had appeared to Zechariah previously (v. 19), was dispatched by God to Nazareth. This was a small village in Galilee, a region north of Judea and Samaria.

1:27 Virgin (Gk *parthenos*) may echo the prophecy of the virgin birth in Is 7:14 (Mt 1:18–25). According to Jewish law, being engaged was just as legally binding as being married (Mt 1:18–19). The house of David was a clan in the tribe of Judah, from which prophecies said the Messiah would come (Gn 49:9–10).

1:28–30 Mary was favored because the Lord set his undeserved grace upon her, not because she had earned good standing. Understandably, she was deeply troubled by Gabriel’s visit and greeting, wondering how she had come to receive such an honor. Gabriel’s admonishment that Mary not be afraid was the same thing he said to Zechariah (v. 13).

1:31–33 The miracle that would cause Mary to conceive and give birth to a son would be a far greater miracle than the one that caused Elizabeth to conceive in old age (vv. 13, 18) because, unlike Elizabeth, Mary was still a virgin (v. 34). The name Jesus (Gk *Iesous*) is equivalent to the Hebrew *Yehoshua* (Joshua), meaning “the Lord is salvation.” Being the Son of the Most High means Jesus was the Son of God himself (v. 35) because God created the life in Mary’s womb without the aid of a human father. Humanly speaking, though, Jesus’s lineage would be traced legitimately through the royal family of David because Joseph, Jesus’s adoptive father, was a descendant of David. This made Jesus heir to David’s throne according to God’s eternal covenant (forever ... his kingdom will have no end, v. 33; see 2Sm 7:13, 16).

1:34–35 The difference between Mary’s response (how can this be) and Zechariah’s (v. 18) is that Mary asked her question not from unbelief but from puzzlement (v. 38). The answer to Mary’s question about how she could get pregnant without having sexual relations with a man is that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and cause her to conceive (see note at vv. 31–33). Because the Holy Spirit was the agent of conception, the child (the holy One; 2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15) would be the Son of God.

1:36–37 There is no way of knowing whether your relative Elizabeth means Elizabeth was Mary’s aunt or cousin. On she has conceived ... the sixth month, see note at vv. 24–25. If ever Mary was tempted to doubt God’s promise to her, she could recall Gabriel’s words that nothing will be impossible with God, as had been shown in the lives of Abraham and Sarah (Gn 18:14).

1:38 Mary’s response is a classic model of humble commitment (I am the Lord’s servant) and willing obedience (may it be done to me according to your word).

1:39–40 Shortly after Gabriel left, Mary traveled to Judah to check on her relative, Elizabeth, whom she had just learned (from the angel) was pregnant (see note at vv. 36–37).

1:41–45 The baby (John) being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 15) fulfilled Gabriel’s prediction to Zechariah. But Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit also (v. 41), and the Spirit’s revelations to her were apparently the source of her knowledge about the blessed roles and identities of Mary and her unborn child. When baby John leaped inside Elizabeth, she understood that he had experienced great joy at Mary’s presence.

1:46–55 Mary’s hymn of praise is known as the “Magnificat,” so named for the Latin term rendered as praises the greatness. It is similar in tone to the song of Hannah (1Sm 2:1–10).

1:46–49 There is a beautiful balance in Mary’s hymn of praise. She expressed humble recognition of the greatness and holy nature of God and his grace (favor) on his voluntary servant, but also an awareness that God’s unique calling on her life would result in all future generations calling her blessed. She viewed herself as both humbled and exalted.

1:50–53 These verses recall the descriptions of God’s justice found throughout the Psalms (e.g., Ps 100:5; 103:11). Those who fear him is an OT expression that is equivalent to the NT idea of faith. Fear of God is faith in God. His arm is figurative for God’s power. God is a Spirit being (Jn 4:24) and does not have a physical body, but bodily metaphors are effective in communicating some of God’s attributes and actions. God is against the proud . . . the mighty, and the rich, who imagine themselves self-sufficient. By contrast, he champions the cause of the lowly and the hungry, for they acknowledge their need for him.

1:54–55 In sending Jesus to be born to Mary, God mercifully helped . . . Israel, in keeping with promises he had made centuries earlier to Abraham and his descendants (see Gn 12:1–3; 22:15–18).

1:56–57 Mary visited Elizabeth shortly after hearing she was “in the sixth month” of her pregnancy (vv. 36, 39–40) and stayed with her about three months. Mary may have returned to Nazareth either shortly before or after the birth of Elizabeth’s son, John. Given their spiritual bond and the great roles their sons would play in God’s plan, it seems likely that Mary stayed for John’s birth.¹

References

1. A. Boyd Luter, “Luke,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1602–1603.